United Nations E/CN.9/2000/2

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
9 December 1999

Original: English

Commission on Population and Development
Thirty-third session
27-31 March 2000
Item 3 of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up actions to the recommendations of the International Conference on Population and Development

Report of the Secretary-General on the special session of the General Assembly for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report responds to a request made by the Commission on Population and Development at its thirty-second session, for a report on the special session of the General Assembly for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. It examines the review and appraisal process, discusses in detail the twenty-first special session of the General Assembly and presents the key future actions agreed to by consensus at the special session. The concluding section presents next steps to be considered in the further implementation of the Programme of Action.

* E/CN.9/2000/1.

00-20117 (E) 280100

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Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared in accordance with the terms of reference of the Commission on Population and Development endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1995/55 of 28 July 1995. It responds to a request made by the Commission on Population and Development at its thirty-second session for a report[1] on the special session of the General Assembly for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.[2]

2. The twenty-first special session of the General Assembly took place at United Nations Headquarters from 30 June to 2 July 1999. During its plenary meetings, it was addressed by 152 Member States, 10 observers and 3 non-governmental organizations. At the opening meeting, the Secretary-General emphasized the connection between population and development and praised the International Conference on Population and Development for promoting a fuller understanding of those interactions. He underscored the linkage between sexual and reproductive health and human rights and urged that efforts be made to fully implement the Programme of Action, particularly the financial resource levels agreed to in Cairo in 1994.

3. At the 1st plenary meeting of its twenty-first special session, the General Assembly established an Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-first Special Session of the General Assembly to consider agenda item 8, entitled "Overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development". In connection with its consideration of the agenda item, the Ad Hoc Committee had before it the report of the Commission on Population and Development acting as the preparatory committee for the special session.[3] Mr. Anwarul Karim Chowdhury (Bangladesh), who had served as Chairman of the preparatory committee, was elected Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee. Over the three-day period, the Ad Hoc Committee held four formal meetings and a number of informal meetings to negotiate the proposals for key actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action. During the formal meetings, representatives of 12 specialized agencies of the United Nations system, 1 intergovernmental organization and 11 non-governmental organizations made statements.

4. At its 4th meeting, on 1 July, the Ad Hoc Committee, after negotiations held in the informal meetings, and noting the reservations expressed by the representatives of Argentina and Nicaragua, recommended to the General Assembly the adoption of the draft resolution entitled "Proposals for key actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development". After the adoption of the report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-first Special Session of the Assembly (A/S-21/5), five delegations expressed reservations.[4] Subsequently, on 2 July 1999, at the closing plenary meeting of the special session, the Assembly adopted by consensus the draft resolution on key actions (A/S-21/5/Add.1). After the adoption of the resolution, 13 States made interpretive statements or expressed reservations.[5]

5. The present report briefly presents the major aspects and events of the review process and the key future actions contained in General Assembly resolution S-21/2. It also highlights some of the findings regarding progress in, and constraints on, the implementation to date of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

I. The review and appraisal process

6. The review and appraisal process of the twenty-first special session of the General Assembly was characterized by broad United Nations system-wide participation and the involvement of a wide range of civil society organizations. In particular, there was close collaboration between the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). United Nations organizations and representatives of civil society took an active part in the round tables, technical meetings and the International Forum for the Operational Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (February 1999). During the period 1998-1999, three United Nations inter-agency meetings were held and there were periodic briefings for Member States and non-governmental organizations at United Nations Headquarters. UNFPA field offices carried out briefings at the country level. This participatory

approach and the transparency with which all meetings and negotiations were carried out greatly contributed to the success of the review process and of the special session.

A. Technical meetings and regional consultations

7. The review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action concentrated primarily on policy changes and operational experiences at the country level in order to identify facilitating factors and obstacles encountered during the initial five-year period since the Conference. Those concrete experiences provided a basis for delineating further actions needed to accelerate and fine-tune the implementation of the Programme of Action.

8. Round tables and technical meetings, sponsored by UNFPA, afforded an opportunity for in-depth examination of the implementation of the Programme of Action. These included three round-table meetings: on adolescent reproductive health (14-17 April 1998, New York, United States of America); on reproductive rights and implementation of reproductive health programmes, women's empowerment, male involvement and human rights (22-25 June 1998, Kampala, Uganda); and on partnership with civil society to implement the Programme of Action (27-30 July 1998, Dhaka, Bangladesh); and four technical symposia: on international migration and development (29 June-3 July 1998, The Hague, Netherlands); on population ageing (6-9 October 1998, Brussels, Belgium); on reproductive health services in crisis situations (3-5 November 1998, Rennes, France); and on population change and economic development (2-6 November 1998, Bellagio, Italy).

9. Regional consultations, convened by the five regional commissions, reviewed and appraised the implementation of the Programme of Action. The meetings identified progress achieved and constraints encountered and proposed key future actions for each region in the particular context of that region. A detailed account of the round tables and technical and regional meetings is found in the report of the Secretary-General on the preparations for the special session (A/53/407) submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. The results of those meetings were available at the time of the twenty-first special session of the Assembly.

B. The Hague Forum

10. The International Forum for the Operational Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (known as The Hague Forum), held in The Hague, 8-12 February 1999, drew on the outcomes of the technical and regional meetings to formulate operationally pertinent recommendations for the next phases of implementing the Programme of Action. Organized by UNFPA and hosted by the Government of the Netherlands, The Hague Forum brought together a wide range of partners, including ministers and other high-level governmental officials from 177 countries and territories, parliamentarians, representatives of United Nations organizations and the specialized agencies, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, youth and the media.

11. The Forum was preceded by three meetings of key partner groups committed to the implementation of the Programme of Action, namely, the International Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (4-6 February 1999); the NGO Forum (6 and 7 February 1999), which gave non-governmental organizations an opportunity to formulate their contribution to the Forum and the special session; and the Youth Forum (6 and 7 February 1999), which was convened to examine how implementation of the Programme of Action met the needs of young people.

12. The report of The Hague Forum (E/CN.9/1999/PC/3, annex) provided an assessment of progress to date in five substantive areas addressed by its Main Committee:

(a) Creating an enabling environment for further implementation of the Programme of Action;

(b) Enhancing gender equality, equity and empowerment of women;

(c) Promoting reproductive health, including family planning and sexual health, and reproductive rights;

(d) Strengthening partnerships;

(e) Mobilizing and monitoring resources for further implementation of the Programme of Action.

13. The Forum report identified actions necessary in each of these areas to enhance the implementation of the Programme of Action. It was submitted to the

preparatory committee for the twenty-first special session of the General Assembly and was drawn upon in the preparation of the Secretary-General's report for the special session containing proposals for key actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action (E/CN.9/1999/PC/4).

C. United Nations Population Fund field inquiry

14. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) conducted a global field inquiry in mid-1998 to assess progress and constraints encountered in the implementation of the Programme of Action. The inquiry focused on the following key areas: policies and programmes in population and development; gender equality, equity and women's empowerment; reproductive rights and reproductive health care; and government partnerships and collaboration with civil society. A total of 114 responses were received from developing countries and countries with economies in transition, and 18 developed countries reported their experiences.

Progress

15. The report of the 1998 UNFPA field inquiry found concrete results in implementation, including integration of population concerns into development strategies; institutional changes to accommodate the operationalization of the Programme of Action; policy, legislative and institutional changes in the areas of population and development and reproductive health and rights; recognition of the enhanced role of civil society; an increased involvement of non-governmental organizations; and improved partnership among United Nations agencies and organizations.

16. Countries have begun initiatives to promote the participation of women at policy- and decision-making levels and progress has been made in advocating for the protection of the well-being of the girl child. Several countries passed legislation outlawing violence against women, with particular focus on the elimination of harmful practices such as female genital mutilation.

17. All countries have accepted the concept of reproductive health, and previously separate family planning programmes are now being integrated into comprehensive reproductive health packages available at the primary health care level. Reproductive health is increasingly considered a priority in health services in emergency situations. Some countries are beginning to address the sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescents, and some concrete measures have been taken to promote male involvement in sexual and reproductive health through advocacy campaigns. There has been some progress in providing access to a full range of safe and reliable family planning methods, and a wider range of contraceptive choices have become available. There is also greater awareness of the risks of maternal mortality and morbidity and recognition of them as developmental and human rights issues.

18. Recognizing the important role of civil society in the implementation of the Programme of Action, many Governments have adopted significant measures to promote the involvement of civil society groups in policy formulation, implementation and monitoring. Some Governments have taken measures to strengthen the institutional capacity of civil society, including the provision of funds and the removal of legal restrictions. Parliamentarians have taken action to adopt legislation on reproductive health and gender-based violence, and they have been instrumental in ensuring provision of national budgetary allocations for population and development.

Constraints

19. A serious lack of financial resources remains one of the primary obstacles to full implementation of the Programme of Action. Donor funding for population activities has stagnated and is far below the required US$ 17 billion by the year 2000, as agreed to at the Conference.

20. Developing countries have made some progress in increasing the share of domestic budgets allocated to population. However, mobilizing domestic resources for financial crises and dislocations has impeded efforts to generate the resources required to implement national population policies and programmes.

21. Despite some progress, sociocultural factors continue to hinder the full achievement of gender equality and equity. Women still face violence at all stages in their life cycle, and poverty remains disproportionately high among female-headed households. The feminization of poverty has increased such forms of violence as trafficking and forced

prostitution. Women are still very much under-represented in positions of power and decision-making, and they typically earn less than men for work of equal value. In many societies, sons are favoured over daughters when choices have to be made.

22. The lack of coordination mechanisms and funding constraints often preclude more extensive collaboration between government and civil society groups. Often, there are no legal frameworks, regulations or guidelines to facilitate partnerships with non-governmental organizations. Insufficient human and financial resources and a lack of technical capacity in both Governments and non-governmental organizations also impede effective partnerships. The private sector continues to remain underinvolved in population and development activities.

II. Twenty-first special session of the General Assembly

A. Preparatory committee for the twenty-first special session of the General Assembly

23. The Commission on Population and Development, which met in an open-ended session at United Nations Headquarters from 24 March to 1 April 1999, acted as the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action. The preparatory committee had before it two information documents: the report of the Secretary-General on the review and appraisal of the progress made in achieving the goals and objectives of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (E/CN.9/1999/PC/2) and the report of the International Forum for the Operational Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (E/CN.9/1999/PC/3, annex); and one document for consideration: the report of the Secretary-General on proposals for key actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (E/CN.9/1999/PC/4). The last-mentioned report served as the basis for formulating a document to be submitted to the special session. Although it reached agreement on a number of sections, the preparatory committee felt that more time was needed to negotiate certain other sections. Hence, it agreed to meet for informal consultations at United Nations Headquarters from 5 to 7 May 1999.

24. During those informal consultations, a number of paragraphs were adopted *ad referendum*. However, there were some problem issues — for example, adolescents; family planning methods; abortion; resource mobilization — on which negotiations could not be completed. It was decided that the preparatory committee would meet again for four days prior to the special session (on 24 and 25 and 28 and 29 June). When the resumed session of the preparatory committee ended on 29 June, several contentious paragraphs remained. The resolution of the issue of those paragraphs was left to the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

25. The Commission on Population and Development, acting as the preparatory committee for the twenty-first special session of the General Assembly, also considered arrangements for the accreditation of non-governmental organizations at the special session. Having noted that, pursuant to Assembly resolutions 52/188 of 18 December 1997 and 53/183 of 15 December 1998, the President of the Assembly had been invited, in consultation with Member States, to propose appropriate modalities for the effective involvement of non-governmental organizations in the special session, the Commission decided to invite to the special session those non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and non-governmental organizations already accredited to the Conference and/or the preparatory committee (decision 1999/PC/1). The Commission acting as the preparatory committee also decided that the accreditation of other interested non-governmental organizations, including those that had applied for consultative status with the Council, should be examined by a committee composed of the Bureau of the preparatory committee and the Secretariat by 14 May 1999. The committee would make appropriate recommendations to the preparatory committee at its resumed session for a decision, provided that requests for accreditation were accompanied by information on the organization's competence and relevance to the subject of the special session.

B. Key actions

26. At the final plenary meeting, held late on 2 July 1999, the 177 Member States participating in the special session adopted by consensus the key actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (A/S-21/5/Add.1). This comprehensive document, arrived at through lengthy negotiation, affirmed the Programme of Action and made a number of noteworthy advances. For example, it called attention to population and development concerns, noting the linkages among population, economic growth and environment. It recognized the implications of changing age structure and the ageing of the population, and underscored the urgent need for policies and programmes to deal with the causes of international migration, internal migration and urbanization, and the resultant dislocations. The General Assembly at its special session called upon Governments to ensure that the human rights of women and girls, particularly the freedom from coercion, discrimination and violence, including harmful practices and sexual exploitation, were respected, protected and promoted through the development, implementation and effective enforcement of gender-sensitive policies and legislation.

27. The General Assembly at its special session called upon Governments to make every effort to implement the Programme of Action in regard to adolescent sexual and reproductive health. There has been an advance in the language since Cairo in that the document called for Governments to provide services to effectively address adolescents' reproductive and sexual health needs, respecting their cultural values and religious beliefs, with an emphasis on the identity and rights of young people themselves. Governments were urged to include, in both formal and non-formal schooling, education about population and health issues, including reproductive health.

28. The General Assembly at its special session recognized that the human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) situation was worse than had been anticipated at the time of the International Conference on Population and Development and strongly expressed its commitment to taking urgent action to address the problem. Similarly, it reaffirmed the Conference commitment to the reduction of maternal morbidity and mortality. The Assembly at its special session emphasized that countries should accord high priority to reducing maternal morbidity and mortality and that progress on this front should be used as an indicator for the success of health sector reform.

29. In agreeing to interim benchmarks in the area of reproductive and sexual health, the General Assembly at its special session reiterated the four central components of sexual and reproductive health: family planning; maternal health; prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases; and prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS. The Assembly at its special session recognized the reproductive health-care needs of women and adolescents in emergency situations and called upon Governments to provide reproductive and sexual health services, among other basic social services.

30. With regard to abortion, the General Assembly at its special session built on the language of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. Abortion was again treated as a public-health problem and the key future actions addressed the consequences of illegal or unsafe abortion on the health of women. The Assembly at its special session accepted that the way to avoid abortion was to provide access to family planning and contraceptive methods. Those services must be accessible in an environment that enabled women to use them effectively.

31. The special session recommended a new goal regarding HIV/AIDS and interim benchmarks, as follows:

(a) To reduce vulnerability to HIV/AIDS infection, at least 90 per cent of young men and women, aged 15-24, should have access by 2005, and at least 95 per cent by 2010, to preventive methods, such as female and male condoms, voluntary testing, counselling and follow-up. HIV infection rates in persons 15 to 24 years of age should be reduced by 25 per cent in the most affected countries by 2005 and by 25 per cent globally by 2010;

(b) The 1990 illiteracy rate for women and girls should be halved by 2005; and by 2010 the net primary school enrolment ratio for children of both sexes should be at least 90 per cent;

(c) By 2005, 60 per cent of primary health care and family planning facilities should offer the widest

achievable range of safe and effective family planning methods, essential obstetric care, prevention and management of reproductive tract infections, including sexually transmitted diseases, and barrier methods to prevent infection; 80 per cent of facilities should offer such services by 2010; and all should do so by 2015;

(d) At least 40 per cent of all births should be assisted by skilled attendants where the maternal mortality rate was very high, and 80 per cent globally, by 2005; these figures should be 50 per cent and 85 per cent, respectively, by 2010; and 60 per cent and 90 per cent, respectively, by 2015;

(e) The gap between the proportion of individuals using contraceptives and the proportion expressing a desire to space or limit their families should be reduced by half by 2005, by 75 per cent by 2010 and by 100 per cent by 2050; and recruitment targets or quotas should not be used in attempting to reach this goal.

III. Next steps

32. The twenty-first special session of the General Assembly was widely regarded as a most successful endeavour. It demonstrated the effectiveness of the United Nations in building global consensus through open and inclusive discussion. It marked the culmination of five years of impressive progress in implementing the Cairo consensus on population as a development issue of concern to all countries. It was especially successful in effectively involving civil society groups, most notably in having three non-governmental organization representatives address the final plenary meeting.

33. The General Assembly at its special session affirmed the commitments made in Cairo in 1994. The progress of the first five years provides an encouraging basis on which to build. Formidable challenges, however, still remain. The UNFPA field inquiry underscored that progress was far from uniform and that much remained to be done.

34. The need to ensure the reproductive rights of individuals, especially women and girls, is as pressing today as it was in 1994. Women die needlessly each year as a result of pregnancy; of the nearly 130 million births each year, more than 60 million are not assisted by a trained attendant; over 350 million women do not have a choice of safe and effective contraceptive methods; millions of women suffer the impact of rape, incest and domestic violence; more than half of all women will suffer some form of gender-based violence at some time in their lives; 2 million girls and young women are at risk of female genital mutilation each year and an estimated 130 million are already affected. Much more remains to be done to meet the needs of adolescents for sexual and reproductive health information and services.

35. Perhaps the most serious constraint on the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development is the shortfall in funding. The Cairo Conference endorsed the figure of $17 billion from all sources to be reached by 2000. It is estimated that developing countries currently spend about $7.7 billion a year, about two thirds of the year 2000 target agreed at Cairo. International donors are providing only a third of their $5.7 billion share. Some donor countries have met their share; most, however, have not.

36. UNFPA in its programming and advocacy will strive, in conjunction with all its partners, to enhance country capacity to meet the International Conference on Population and Development goals. The Fund will work with programme countries and the donor community to augment the funds available for population and mobilize support for reaching the financial targets specified in the Programme of Action of the Conference and reaffirmed by the special session of the General Assembly on the Conference plus five.

37. Partnerships are critical to the further implementation of the Programme of Action. It is essential that the excellent United Nations system collaboration that characterized the Conference plus five effort continue. At an ad hoc meeting of the Task Force on Basic Social Services for All (28 October 1999), United Nations organizations and agencies agreed to work together in a number of the areas identified as key future actions by the General Assembly at its special session.

38. Resource mobilization for population activities must be placed high in the global development agenda if the international community is to fully implement the Conference goals and objectives.

39. Over the next few years, there will be a number of special sessions of the General Assembly marking the fifth anniversary of other major United Nations conferences and summits. Those involved with the

special session on the International Conference on Population and Development plus five have met with the respective secretariats of those events to convey the "lessons learned" from the twenty-first special session.

40. Attention should now turn towards possible options to mark the tenth anniversary, in 2004, of the adoption of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. The Bureau of the Commission on Population and Development at its 1999 inter-sessional meeting recommended that options for the 2004 event be discussed by the Commission at its thirty-third session (E/CN.9/2000/CRP.1, annex III, sect. II, para.4).

Notes

[1] An earlier version of this report (A/54/442) was submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session.

[2] *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XIII.18), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

[3] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-first Special Session, Supplement No. 1* and addenda (A/S-21/2 and Add.1 and 2).

[4] Argentina, Guatemala, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Nicaragua and the Sudan.

[5] Australia, China, Egypt, the Holy See, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Malta, Morocco, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, the United States of America and Yemen.